



ROCKFORD POLICE DEPARTMENT

GENERAL ORDER

NUMBER: 1.16

TITLE: News Media Relations

SERIES NUMBER: 1

SERIES TITLE / SUBJECT: Law Enforcement Role, Responsibility and Relationship

TOPICS/ REFERENCE: Information Requests, News Media on Scene, Press Conference, Press Release, Public Release of Information, Public Information Officer, NIXLE, Reverse 911, Police Blotter, Social Media use by the Department.

APPENDICIES: None

EFFECTIVE / ORIGINAL ISSUE DATE: July 15, 1977

REVISION / EFFECTIVE DATES: February 14, 2014

THIS ORDER REMAINS IN EFFECT UNTIL REVISED OR RECINDED

CALEA STANDARDS: 54.1.1 - 54.1.2 - 54.1.3

Policy:

It is the policy of the Rockford Police Department to extend full cooperation to members of the news media and the community fostering an atmosphere of openness, trust and mutual respect. Information shall be released to the news media in an impartial, accurate and timely fashion, consistent with the protection of the rights of involved individuals and with consideration for the need to maintain the confidentiality of records.

Purpose:

The purpose of this General Order is to establish procedures and guidelines for members of this Department when dealing with the news media.

These guidelines are not meant to be all-inclusive, since each incident must be dealt with on an individual basis, but are intended as broad guidelines to assist the employees and supervisors involved.

This Order is comprised of the following numbered sections:

- I. DEFINITIONS
- II. AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY
- III. PROCEDURES
- IV. PROHIBITED ACTS
- V. INFORMATION RELEASE GUIDELINES
- VI. PRESS CONFERENCES

- VII. NEWS MEDIA REVIEW
- VIII. EFFECTIVE DATE
- IX. REVIEWS, REVISIONS AND CANCELLATIONS

I. Definitions:

- A. News Media: Refers to the section of the mass media that focuses on presenting current news to the public. These include print media, broadcast media and internet-based media.
- B. Response to Media Inquiries: answers to on-the-scene, in-person, e-mail or telephone media questions.
- C. News Conference: An announced, pre-arranged meeting with news media for the purpose of releasing written and/or oral information and responding to questions.
- D. Written Media Release: A prepared statement that is released to the news media at a news conference or is made available to the media at the Public Safety Building.
- E. Major Incident: Forcible felonies, allegations of misconduct by Department employees, death or serious injury to a police officer, use of force incidents, catastrophic events, hostage or barricaded subject, deaths involving juveniles, bomb threats or explosions, riots, and mass arrests.
- F. NIXLE: Nixle is a privately held U.S. corporation that offers both free and paid notification services for local police departments, county emergency management offices, municipal governments and their agencies. The Nixle service allows verified government agencies to send messages to local residents via phone, email and web. Information is delivered almost instantly to geographically targeted consumers
- G. Reverse 911: Reverse 911 is a public safety communications system. It is used by public safety organizations in Canada and the United States to communicate with groups of people in a defined geographic area. The system uses a database of telephone numbers and associated addresses, which, when tied into geographic information systems (GIS), can be used to deliver recorded emergency notifications to a selected set of telephone service subscribers
- H. Police Blotter: Rockford Police Department's public notification system. This site is used to notify the public and media of significant incidents that occurred in the City and is displayed on the Department's website. All supervisory personnel have access to post incidents to this site.
- I. Social Media: the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Some examples of social media are: Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, etc.

II. Authority and Responsibility:

- A. The Chief of Police, or his designee, shall respond to media inquiries regarding major incidents.
- B. The Public Information Officer is responsible for:
 - 1. Coordinating all public information activities at the Department level.

2. Working with the City of Rockford's Public Information Officer on gathering information and releasing information to the media about award recipients, promotes, hiring, any other public event sponsored by or endorsed by the Police Department.
 3. Contacting representatives of the news media for input and comment when changes in media guidelines are planned.
 4. Implement and coordinate the Department's social media outlets.
- C. On-duty acting Commanders and Supervisors may respond to media inquiries to non-major incidents and may conduct informal interviews with the media at the scene of non-major incidents following the guidelines of this general order.
- D. Patrol Officers and Investigators are prohibited from initiating any contact either written or orally regarding any official Department matter with the news media without prior approval from the Chief of Police, their Bureau Deputy Commander, or the Public Information Officer. Officers at the scene of an incident, who are approached by a member of the news media, shall refer all questions to the on scene supervisor, or in the absence of a supervisor, to their immediate supervisor or the Shift Commander.

III. Procedures:

- A. Members of the news media are welcome at the Department at any time. However, it may be advantageous for media representatives to maintain a regular schedule so the Public Information Officers will be available to assist them in obtaining information.
 - B. Media personnel shall be permitted to review reports that are available at the Records Bureau, until a time the Department develops and implements an on-line reporting system.
 - C. Dissemination of information to the news media shall be accomplished in a manner with ensures equal availability to all news media members. Prior to any public briefing or news conference, all local news media representatives shall be notified by the Public Information Officer or his designee. The Public Information Officer shall work with the City of Rockford's Public Information Officer to ensure the media contact list is current.
 - D. All information released to the media shall be released in accordance with this General Order and applicable State and Federal statutes pertaining to Freedom of Information.
 - E. As soon as practical after a major incident the Shift Commander, Public Information Officer, or their designee should issue a NIXLE alert and/or publish the information on the Police Blotter. NIXLE alerts and Police Blotter posts should be complete, yet concise so as to provide the public and the media information about the incident. NIXLE alerts should be made for emergency or community events. (ie. Traffic crash with road closure, power outages, severe weather, neighborhood meetings, etc).
1. Notifications to the Chief of Police, Commanders of Police and Assistant Commanders of Police should be made prior to sending a NIXLE alert in

cases of Homicide, Serious Traffic obstructions, or any other incident where a potential death could occur.

2. Police Blotter and/or NIXLE posts should be issued for these types of incidents:
 - a. Homicide
 - b. Aggravated Battery with Firearm
 - c. Any Robbery to business
 - d. Home Invasion
 - e. Other criminal incidents where a potential death could occur
 - f. Fatal and potentially fatal traffic crashes
 - g. Serious felonies for which an arrest has been made
 - h. Serious traffic obstructions (whether because of a traffic crash or other issue)
 - i. Police activity where areas should be avoided
 - j. Public Service Announcements
 - k. S.W.A.T. call outs
 3. Police Blotter and/or NIXLE posts should include:
 - a. A general location of the incident
 - b. The time of the incident
 - c. A concise and general synopsis of the incident
 - d. Suspect descriptions
 - e. Suspect vehicle descriptions
 - f. Identity of suspects WHEN AN ARREST HAS BEEN MADE (when it does not affect the on-going investigation) This should include first and last name, excluding middle initial, age (omit date of birth) and what city the suspect resides.
 - g. The charges lodged against a suspect (do not use abbreviations).
 - h. When the identity of an arrested person has been made, a presumption of innocence disclaimer should accompany the information.
 - i. The name of the issuing supervisor (mandatory)
 - j. If a Press Release is forthcoming.
 4. Once a Police Blotter post or NIXLE alert has been issued, supervisors should refer all additional news media inquiries to the alert. In the event a NIXLE alert is issued regarding a request to avoid an area, an additional alert should be issued when the situation has cleared. In the event a supervisor reasonably believes that the release of a NIXLE alert or a post to the Police Blotter, or including certain information in an alert would compromise an investigation, the supervisor should not issue that alert or release that information.
- F. All Patrol Commanders, Patrol Supervisors, Community Services Officers and the Public Information Officer will be trained in the use of the Reverse 911 system. Reverse 911 is generally used to alert the public to scheduled events but can be used in emergencies to alert the public in a specified geographical location of an imminent emergency.

- G. The Department shall maintain a 'Media Arrest Log' link on the Rockford Police Department official web site on the Internet. This web site shall contain all approved arrests of individuals age 18 and over made in the last seven days. Displayed will be specific information about the arrestee, as well as incident information such as case number, arrest date and time, location and the charge(s). Written media releases shall also be placed on the web site for dissemination.
 - 1. The Chief of Police Commanders or their designee have the ability to suppress arrest information for 72 hours on the following cases:
 - a. Sensitive cases,
 - b. Cases requiring additional investigation
 - c. Case involving arrest for any narcotic activity
 - 2. Arrest information needing to be permanently suppressed must be approved by the Chief of Police or a Commander.
 - H. Commanders and Supervisors will assist all news media personnel, to the extent possible, without interfering with an investigation.
 - I. At incident scenes, it may be necessary to establish perimeters and control access. Any such limitations should be clearly explained to the news media personnel. News media personnel shall not be in a position to interfere with law enforcement operations. Depending on the situation, media personnel may be allowed access. Normally, a specific area for media access and meeting will be established in order to provide a cooperative and accurate flow of information concerning the incident. Officers may not grant news media personnel access to private property. Where possible, news media personnel should be restricted to public property.
 - J. In a multi-jurisdictional investigation, the lead investigative agency is responsible for providing or coordinating the release of public information.
 - K. The Department may deny access to the scene of an incident or its files to any news media representative who:
 - 1. Interferes in an investigation while at the scene of an ongoing incident;
 - 2. Interferes with the effective operation of the Department or any of its members;
 - 3. Obtains or publishes restricted information;
 - 4. Violates established media relations procedures.
- IV. Prohibited Acts:
- A. No member of the Department will release any information to the news media that concerns the following:
 - 1. A prior criminal record of an individual that has been arrested or anything that pertains to the character or reputation of the accused,
 - 2. Any investigation being conducted by the Office of Professional Standards whether the investigation is ongoing or not. Any inquiries from any source relating to internal investigations or crisis situations within the Department will be referred to the Chief of Police or the Office of Professional Standards Commander,

3. The identity, potential testimony or credibility of any potential witness,
4. Any opinion as to the accused's guilt, innocence or merits of the case.
- B. The deliberate posing of a person in custody for photographing or televising by members of the media is expressly prohibited.
- C. The release of information of any individual that has been killed in an accident or other incident prior to the notification of the next of kin is prohibited.
- D. The name and/or address of any victim of a sex crime will not be released to the media unless the victim has died as a result of the crime and then only with the approval of the Chief of Police.
- E. The identity of juveniles arrested will not be released. Records concerning juvenile offenders will not be open to public inspection or released to the media, unless there is a valid court order. A minor who is a victim of any offense shall have the same confidentiality.

V. Information Release Guidelines:

- A. Media releases are to be prepared by the Chief of Police, any member of the Command Staff, Public Information Officer, or their designees.
- B. The following information may generally be released unless otherwise restricted by Court Order, Case Law, the Freedom of Information Act or by direction of a supervisor:
 1. The type or nature of an incident,
 2. Specific information about the incident related to:
 - a. The location of an incident,
 - b. Date and time of an incident,
 - c. The identity of the victim. (First name, last name, age, city of residence)
 - i. If death or serious injury is involved, the identity of the victim should be withheld for a reasonable length of time pending notification of relatives.
 - d. Injuries sustained,
 - e. Damages, and;
 - f. A brief description of what happened.
 3. Subsequent to an arrest or issuance of an arrest warrant of an adult the following information may include:
 - a. The accused's name (omit middle initial), age (omit date of birth), city of residence and occupation (if necessary), whether the accused is on probation or parole; if he/she has not been arrested, whatever is necessary to assist in his/her apprehension, or whatever is necessary to warn the public of any dangers.
 - b. Time and place of arrest,
 - c. Address of arrested,
 - d. The nature of the charges and description of the offense(Do not use abbreviations)
 - e. The circumstances involved in the arrest of the accused.
 - f. The identity of the arresting officers and investigating officers, the agencies involved and the length of the investigation.

- g. A description of the physical evidence seized.
 - h. If available, attaching photographs of arrested suspects, unless it interferes with the furtherance of the investigation
 - i. The fact a defendant has been charged with a crime may NOT be released unless a statement is included explaining the charge is merely an accusation, and the defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty. (*i.e. "The charges against (defendant) are merely accusations. The defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law."*)
4. The facts and circumstances of a juvenile arrest :
(Illinois statutes state that arrest information involving juveniles cannot be released to the public. This includes juveniles under 18 years of age who are arrested for criminal offenses and juveniles less than 16 years of age arrested for traffic offenses).
- a. Time and place of arrest,
 - b. Address of arrested (should be limited to city of residence)
 - c. Age of arrested, and;
 - d. Charge(s).
 - e. Name(s) of juveniles and photograph(s) arrested are never released. (*705 ILCS 405/5-901*)
 - f. Juveniles charged as an adult for cases enumerated under 705 ILCS 405/5-105 have no privacy protection and therefore their identities, including photograph may be released.
5. The identity of the victim, except for sex crimes and juveniles.
- a. If death or serious injury is involved, the identity of the victim should be withheld pending notification of next of kin.
- C. The following information should not be released:
- 1. Any information regarding confidential Department investigations and/or operations,
 - a. Confidential information may only be released with the authorization of the Chief of Police.
 - 2. Any information that could jeopardize an ongoing investigation,
 - 3. Names, addresses and any other information that would identify the victim of a sex crime, child abuse or other crime where the privacy of the victim is protected by law,
 - 4. Names, addresses, and basic information about juveniles as governed by the laws of the State of Illinois (*705 ILCS 405/5-901*).
 - 5. Active criminal investigation information, active criminal intelligence information and surveillance techniques,
 - 6. Grand jury testimony or proceedings,
 - 7. Names of witnesses or informants
 - 8. Any information concerning an investigation or alleged investigation by the Office of Professional Standards,
 - 9. Names of suspects who were not charged with an offense,

10. No opinion shall be given as to the guilt or innocence of any defendant or suspect,
 11. The existence or contents of any purported confession, admission or statements given by a defendant or suspect or their refusal or failure to make such a statement, and;
 12. Any information concerning the character or reputation of the accused.
 13. The results of any examination or tests or the failure of the accused to submit to any examinations or tests.
 14. The content of any written statements made by any witnesses.
 15. Any opinion of the creditability of any witness
 16. The possibility of a plea of guilty or not guilty.
 17. Any opinion on the merits of a case or of the accuser's guilt or innocence.
 18. Access to the departments "Squeal Sheet" or any other data contained in the departments SharePoint.
 19. i. The department "Squeal Sheet" and SharePoint data is an internal means of communication, intended for the use of department personnel only. This information will not be made available to anyone except department personnel. Any other information prohibited by State law or Department rules and regulations.
- D. Media Releases are distributed in the following manner:
1. Updated electronic Media Distribution lists are maintained by the City of Rockford Public Information Officer.
 2. In general, Media Releases are electronically sent to the news desks of surrounding news outlets.
 3. Media Releases are available for pick up from the Public Safety Building.
 4. All Media Releases are posted on the City of Rockford Police Department web page.
- VI. Press Conferences:
- A. Formal press conferences shall be conducted at the Public Safety Building or other areas as determined by the Chief of Police or his designee.
 - B. The Chief of Police, the Public Information Officer or their designee shall be the official spokesperson at all press conferences.
- VII. News Media Review:
- A. News media representatives are encouraged to participate in the process of developing procedures relating to news dissemination and to make recommendations to improve existing policy.
 - B. The Commander of the Administrative Services Bureau will contact news media representatives and advise them of any proposed significant changes to this policy and provide an opportunity for input.
- VIII. Effective Date:
- A. This policy became effective July 15, 1977.

IX. Reviews, Revisions and Cancellations:

- A. This General Order will be reviewed each May by the Accreditation Section and, when necessary, revised or cancelled in accordance with the procedures for reviewing written directives established in General Order *10.01 – Written Directives*.
- B. This order is a revision of and supercedes General Order *A9 – News Media Relations*, issued July 15, 1977 and Memorandum *2008-039 – Electronic Arrest Log* issued July 10, 2008
- C. Any employee with suggestions for revisions and/or improvements to this order is encouraged to submit their ideas to the Commander of the Administrative Services Bureau.

By Order of
Chet Epperson
Chief of Police